

From: Clair Bell, Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Public Health

To: Scrutiny Committee – 13 October 2021

Topic: **Update on Progress of the Loneliness and Social Isolation Select Committee Recommendations**

Summary: This report presents an update on the progress made against each of the recommendations to the Loneliness and Social Isolation Select Committee and an overview of Kent's position in relation to national developments.

Recommendations: Members of the Scrutiny Committee are asked to **NOTE** the progress of the Loneliness and Social Isolation Select Committee recommendations

1. Background

- 1.1 The Select Committee on Loneliness and Social Isolation was convened formally. Having undertaken site visits, and considering both written and verbal testimonials, the committee approved its report and accompanying recommendations at a formal meeting on 18 February 2019.
- 1.2 The Select Committee duly submitted its report to Cabinet for comment and on 21 March 2019, the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Public Health, presented the report to County Council for its endorsement.
- 1.3 On 26 July 2019, officers attended Scrutiny Committee to set out how they proposed to take the recommendations of the report forward.
- 1.4 In March 2020, the Select Committee was reconvened to receive an update on the progress made against each of the recommendations. This meeting was cancelled due to the lockdown measures implemented by Government in response to the Coronavirus pandemic.
- 1.5 This report presents a summary of progress made against each recommendation. It should be noted that all projects have been impacted to some degree by the pandemic, either because this has halted activity or because a change in approach has been necessary.

2. Main report

- 2.1 The impact of loneliness and social isolation on both physical and mental health is well documented, with evidence showing loneliness can be as bad for health as obesity or smoking. Loneliness is also linked to increased risk of heart disease and stroke, depression, Alzheimer's and cognitive decline.
- 2.2 In response to this evidence and the Jo Cox Commission on Loneliness, the Government published its first strategy on loneliness and social isolation in October 2018. The first annual review of the 60 commitments made within that strategy was published in January 2020.

- 2.3 Key messages from the review are that civil society is key to reducing loneliness and that a whole society approach is essential. In addition, Government recognised that no one department holds the responsibility or the levers to tackle loneliness and that a cross government approach is needed.
- 2.4 The same ethos is reflected in Local Government Association (LGA) and National Association of Local Councils (NALC) “Reaching out: Guide to helping principal and local councils tackle loneliness” (published September 2019) which emphasises the need to take “a whole place, whole system view of ‘community’ ”.
- 2.5 The LGA guide also recognises that loneliness needs to be tackled at a local level “through enabling people to make connections, increasing the number of relationships or quality of relationships that people have, linking people through technology and transport and creating the right environment through volunteering and developing community-based assets.”
- 2.6 The recommendations of the Council’s Select Committee reflect the importance of these types of approach. For example, the Kent County Council Civil Society Strategy outlines the role that individual residents as well as voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) organisations play in building a connected society. A connected society enables the reduction of social isolation and loneliness by creating the right environment to increase the number and quality of social interactions that people have.
- 2.7 Cross directorate approaches to reducing social isolation and loneliness can be seen both through projects taking place within individual directorates, such as:
- recognition of the Growth, Environment and Transport (GET) offer to residents within the Adult Social Care and Health (ASCH) Universal Wellbeing contract
 - the social prescribing plus pilot within the Community Warden Service which is supporting vulnerable residents to stay connected within their local communities and develop community assets.
- 2.8 The resilient communities’ element of the Making a Difference Everyday Programme, in adult social care recognises the valuable contribution that communities make to the lives of residents and vice versa. It also recognises the role that adult social care can play in facilitating and enabling the development of communities that are supportive and inclusive of all residents.
- 2.9 The Government’s annual review also provides updates in relation to social prescribing link workers for GP surgeries, the Let’s Talk Loneliness Campaign and Office of National Statistics package of information on measuring loneliness.
- 2.10 In Kent, officers continue to work collaboratively with health colleagues in relation to social prescribing, most notably with the development of a single directory of community-based services for Kent and Medway that will provide

an invaluable tool for social prescribers to use when connecting people to community resources.

- 2.11 The government also announced that it would be investing an additional £2m in grant funding into their Building Connections fund which provides funding to community projects that connect people.
- 2.12 Recognising the role of the VCSE or 'civil' society in connecting people and communities, the KCC Civil Society Strategy, which is due to be published in December 2021, outlines a commitment to the Council's ongoing support for this sector. The types of support identified as part of the consultation include:
- access grants to small organisations for their core mission
 - opportunities to network
 - access to digital training and use of digital tools
 - access to expertise and
 - support to develop organisations.
- 2.13 The dementia friendly communities project has been in place in Kent since 2013. Its primary focus is on raising awareness of dementia within local communities and creating a supportive community environment in which people living with dementia can continue to live the life they want. This has included the development across the county of dementia cafes, many of which have been set up and run by the local community. Officers are building on the lessons learnt from this project, and as we move towards 'friendly' communities. For example, by developing the existing Dementia Friendly Business Recognition Symbol to reflect inclusion for people with invisible disabilities.
- 2.14 The inclusion of access to digital training and use of digital tools, for example, the Kara project, reflects the increasing importance of digital technology not only to help organisations develop and build their capacity, but also to create and sustain social connections. This is reflected in the LGA guidance and is being explored further in Kent through projects such as Empower Care. This is a three-year Interreg funded project which aims to combine three areas of activity: empowerment, technology strategies and workforce development to create resilience communities and reduce social isolation. It builds on the ESTHER (what matters to you?) model of care which places a person at the centre of decision making about the care they receive.
- 2.15 Further detailed updates on the individual recommendations can be found in Appendix 1.

3. Summary

- 3.1 The select committee on social isolation and loneliness identified 11 recommendations on how to address this issue within Kent. However, subsequent conversations with the panel convened as part of those recommendations has illustrated the need to embed an awareness and commitment to addressing social isolation and loneliness across the Council as a core part of our work.

- 3.2 The recommendations of the select committee reflect the findings, recommendations and key points from the Government's initial and one year on report on social isolation and loneliness and recommendations from the LGA guide.
- 3.3 It is also clear that directorates within the Council are working collaboratively not only to implement and embed the recommendations of the select committee but to address social isolation and loneliness more broadly through other projects and initiatives illustrating a commitment to address this issue and improve wellbeing for residents.

4. Recommendation

4.1 Members of the Scrutiny Committee are asked to **NOTE** the progress of the Loneliness and Social Isolation Select Committee recommendations

5. Background Documents

Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport/Office for Civil Society – Loneliness Annual Report: the first year

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/loneliness-annual-report-the-first-year>

Local Government Association – Reaching Out Guide

<https://www.local.gov.uk/reaching-out>